

# Cultural Resources— Maximizing the Benefits of Our Heritage, Talents & Diversity

*The celebration of the City's bicentennial in 2005 continues to call to mind the value of our rich cultural heritage, the wide range of visual and performing talent in our culturally diverse community, and the many public events and venues that the City offers its citizens and visitors. The annual Independence Day Parade, with its broad mixture of themes, activities and participants, exemplifies the breadth and depth of the cultural heritage, talent and diversity found within the City of Fairfax. Our Cultural Resources enrich our civic pride and promote the City's commercial base.*

The City provides and supports a wide variety of cultural activities to enhance the quality of life for its residents. The Parks and Recreation Department serves as the City's administrator of these activities, as the technical experts, and as the liaison for cultural events and the arts. The Parks and Recreation Department provides all age groups with a wide variety of year-round leisure activities. The City promotes activities and informs citizens about events through a number of means, including: the Community Calendars on Cityscene (the City's newsletter) and Cityscreen-12 (the City's local cable television channel), Parks and Recreation's quarterly publication Leisure Times, and the City's website.



Fourth of July Parade

## Existing Special Events

The City sponsors many annual special events that offer a taste of the City's culture and traditions. These major annual events include a wide variety of cultural themes spread fairly evenly through the year.

- During the first full weekend in March, the City of Fairfax supports a weekend-long **Chocolate Lovers Festival**. This event not only provides weekend activities for City residents, it also provides opportunities for local merchants to exhibit and sell traditional and exotic chocolate confections to chocolate lovers who gather from all across the Northern Virginia region.
- In April, the City supports **Spotlight on the Arts**. This event features art exhibits, plays, dance, and choral, jazz and classical ensembles at locations spread throughout the City and the University.
- During the first weekend in May each year the City supports **Fairfax Civil War Day**, presented by Historic Fairfax City, Inc. and the 17th Virginia Infantry, Company D "Fairfax Rifles", held at the Historic Blenheim Estate. The event features an array of activities highlighting the American Civil War. The event includes period music, living history encampments and demonstrations, children's activities, tours of the Blenheim house and grounds, as well as talks in the Interpretive Center.

- For one week in late June, the City hosts ***Movies under the Moon*** at Van Dyck Park. The event is sponsored by Cox Communications and raises money for the INOVA Fairfax Children's Hospital.
- During the Spring, Summer and Fall seasons, the City hosts weekly ***Farmers Markets***. These include a County-sponsored market at Van Dyck Park and a market at Main and North Streets sponsored by the Downtown Fairfax Coalition. These markets feature fresh foods in addition to a select assortment of other merchandise.
- The City's annual ***4th of July*** celebration, cosponsored by the City of Fairfax and the Independence Day Celebration Committee, is the largest in the Washington metropolitan region. The parade features floats, marching bands and a variety of cultural exhibits in motion. The events later in the day include the Old Fashioned Fireman's Day competition and family picnics, culminating in family entertainment and fireworks at Fairfax High School.
- Each September brings the ***Fall for the Book*** festival, centered in downtown Fairfax and the George Mason University campus. This week-long multiple-venue, regional festival, co-sponsored by the City and the University, offers activities for readers of all ages, including readings, discussions, lectures and exhibits by internationally recognized writers.
- In October the City produces the ***Fall Festival***, which started out as a small market for artisans to display their wares but has grown to an annual event, offering over 500 arts, crafts, information and food vendors. The Fall Festival now includes a carnival, along with an antique car show, and live entertainment. A key component of the success of the Fall Festival is the City's hometown community atmosphere.
- The ***Holiday Craft Show***, sponsored annually by the City in November, has grown in number of artisans, variety of crafts, number of attendees, and total sales since its inception in 1987. Artists from all over the United States now join our local artists in offering a wide variety of holiday gifts.
- In early December the City organizes the annual ***Festival of Lights and Carols*** in downtown Fairfax. This event features holiday illumination of the downtown Historic District, an evening of

caroling, the lighting of the City tree and a visit from Santa Claus. Singers close the evening with traditional carols.

## Existing Supporting Facilities

Community groups, civic associations, and religious organizations use the City's elementary schools, Lanier Middle and Fairfax High School as well as the City of Fairfax Library, Green Acres Center, Old Town Hall and the Stacy C. Sherwood Community Center for meetings, athletic league activities, cultural programming, religious services, and rehearsal space. Beginning with a City-wide survey in 1988, PRAB found the need for facilities to support youth/teen classes, children's activities, senior adult programs, community theater, seminars, athletics and day care. A 1996 follow-up study by a consultant identified the need for a regulation gymnasium, outdoor athletic fields, and multipurpose space. The Sherwood Community Center, completed in 2011, is the latest venue for cultural activities in the City, consisting of galleries/reception rooms, an art room, activity room and rehearsal space.

The City of Fairfax Regional Library, relocated from its previous location on Chain Bridge Road, opened its doors on January 26, 2008. The library offers a 2-story parking garage with drive-up book drop off, a large meeting room and two conference rooms, wireless internet access throughout the building, dozens of internet workstations and a large periodical collection, including titles in Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese and French. The library also provides significant cultural opportunities through its Virginia Room, the foremost collection of books, photographs, and manuscripts related to Fairfax history, government, and genealogy.



City of Fairfax Regional Library

## Resources for the Arts

The City has long supported the arts through the Commission on the Arts, the annual Spotlight on the Arts events, the Fairfax Art League, the City Band, and numerous other programs and groups. In addition, George Mason University has provided a growing base of resources for the arts over the past 30 years. The Fairfax High School's Academy for Communications and the Arts serves as a magnet program for communications and the arts for the Fairfax County Public Schools system.

The *Commission on the Arts*, created in 1979, is a 15-member board appointed by City Council that supports many activities, events and groups through the events it administers as well as its grant programs and support to local arts organizations. In addition, the Commission supports Spotlight on the Arts, the Old Town Hall Performance Series, Old Town Hall Children's Series, Fall for the Book, Summer Band Concert Series, the Irish Folk Festival, and the Celtic Christmas Concert.

The *Fairfax Art League* has also actively operated exhibits in the City, serving resident artists as a local guild and serving the residents of the City to make art available in the public buildings of the City. The City provides exhibit space on the second floor of Old Town Hall, while the Fairfax Art League provides art works for exhibition and sale at City Hall.

Opportunities involving the arts in the City of Fairfax are not limited to performing and watching. City residents also have a wide variety of opportunities for expanding personal skills and abilities in the arts. Courses in music, dance, theater, painting and sculpture are available through the City's recreation program, through local arts organizations, as well as through George Mason University and private lessons.

Much of the interaction the public has with the City's arts and cultural offerings occur at the numerous free cultural events that are offered throughout the year. These events include the following:

- Held on the first and third Mondays of each month, September through July, the *Children's Performance Series* at Old Town Hall is a free children's concert series presented by the City of Fairfax Commission on the Arts. The series includes puppet shows, music, magic, storytelling and more.
- The *Bonita Lestina Performance Series*, presented by the City of Fairfax Commission on the Arts, offers free performances held on the second and fourth Fridays of the month, October through April at Old Town Hall.
- The *Friday Morning Music Club* is a community of music lovers and musicians, dedicated to promoting classical music in the Washington area. FMMC's public concerts provide performing members with a host of outlets for their talents as well as delighting audiences in Washington DC, Maryland, and Virginia. All concerts are free and held on the third Thursday of the month, October through May. Outreach recitals at senior facilities, in-home musicales and master classes provide additional opportunities for members to explore music together without audition. The Club also fosters the development of local talent through competitions for local students and recitals by student members. Through the Friday Morning Music Club Foundation, it supports renowned international competitions for emerging professional string players, pianists, singers and composers.
- The *City of Fairfax Band* includes a full volunteer band with an annual calendar that includes a free Summer Concert Series, with performances held at the Veterans Amphitheater on City Hall grounds, Old Town Hall and Fairfax High School. The Band also offers musical performances by ensembles such as the Alte Kameraden German Band, the Fairfax Saxophone Quartet, the Rebel Run Dixieland Band, the Main Street Community Band, the Northern Virginia Youth Strings and the Fairfax Swing Band.
- Since 1986 the annual *Spotlight on the Arts* events have included a wide variety of exhibits and performances. Now including approximately 75 performances, activities and special events by more than 25 artists and art organizations, Spotlight on the Arts offers exhibits of paintings, drawings and sculpture, dramatic choral and dance productions; and orchestral, swing, jazz and other instrumental music.
- Presented by the Fairfax Art League as part of a joint exhibition in Old Town Hall with Fairfax High School, *Art in the Park* includes a day in which the public has an opportunity to participate with artists and watch the artists as they work in the Kitty Pozer Garden in April.



- The *Irish Folk Festival* is a free day-long festival held in September at the Sherwood Center which celebrates Irish and Celtic, song, dance and music. Performers, both international, national and from around the region present the best of their events and encourage audience participation.

In addition to those listed above, the City sponsors other events annually, such as the second Sundays museum speaker series. New events are also being added to the City's calendar including the first annual *Paint the City* outdoor painting event held in April 2011, which gave local artists an opportunity to capture the beauty and history of the City through their art. The finished pieces were then displayed at the Sherwood Center and auctioned at the City's 50th anniversary celebration.

Other events occurring in the City that are not City sponsored include religious holiday events such as the Ramadan Tent & Turkish Cultural Exhibitions presented in August by the American Turkish Friendship Association; events at the local churches including organ recitals; events sponsored by and held at Fairfax High School; and events held at the Regional Library such as personalized genealogical tutoring, book discussions and children's events.

## George Mason University as a Cultural Resource

George Mason University (GMU) contributes greatly to the presence of arts in the Central Fairfax Area. The GMU Center for the Arts offers three performance facilities; the 1,935 seat Concert Hall with a state of the art lighting and sound system, the 430 seat Harris Theatre and the brand new DeLaski Performing Arts Building. The Concert Hall, which was completed in 1990, has a busy performance schedule that includes both campus productions and professional touring artists and companies. Visual art facilities at GMU include a Gallery in the Johnson Center as well as the Concert Hall Gallery and galleries in the Fine Arts Building and the Krasnow Institute. Temporary exhibits and showcases of student work can also be found in the halls of the Fine Arts Building.

GMU also provides the community with cinematic presentations that augment the offerings at the area's commercial theatres. In addition to a Johnson Center Cinema schedule, which includes both popular and independent films during their "second run" periods, the university also holds occasional film festivals featuring international and independent/ art cinema titles not usually seen in commercial theatres.

Another important entertainment contribution GMU makes to the community is providing a broad array of sporting events. GMU fields a NCAA Division I team in every major sport except for football which competes in the intercollegiate Sea Board Conference. Other than basketball, most sports have free or very low-cost admissions. The University's Patriot Center, a 10,000-seat arena, primarily the home venue for GMU's basketball team, also hosts concerts, family shows and other events requiring larger facilities and crowd capacities.

In addition to these larger events, speakers and other performers will also periodically visit the GMU campus. Although many of these events are open to the public, they are generally not widely advertised and require citizens to check the university's "Today at Mason" web page to keep informed of upcoming events.

## Private Sector Cultural and Art Venues

In addition to the Cultural facilities that the City and GMU provide, there exist several private venues for the presentation of cultural events. The Cinema Arts theatre, located in Fair City Mall, is a six-screen movie complex that devotes most of its screen time to features not seen in most commercial multiplexes, especially away from the metropolitan area's urban core. Cinema Arts also stages occasional special events such as film festivals based on a particular ethnic or national cinema, in addition to having a Sunday morning club devoted to the screening of unreleased or low profile films. The Hub Theatre is the resident company at the John Swazye Theatre, a professional, 70-seat venue with stadium seating and a two-level stage located at the New School of Northern Virginia east of Pickett Road in the City.

The City has several commercial art studios and galleries. Galleries and other private-sector cultural facilities should be targeted for Old Town in order to attract people and provide complementary activities.

## Culture as a Tourism Generator

The City of Fairfax has all of the “ingredients” that are necessary for the development of a highly successful tourism industry. Many of these ingredients are related to the culture of the City. Its history, architecture, landscapes, art, restaurants and diversity are among the more valued by tourists. The further development of cultural facilities—with a mind to their value to tourists—could greatly benefit the City’s efforts to promote tourism.

Existing programs such as the historic properties walking tours, the Old Town Fairfax design guidelines, GMU resources and the monthly special events could be easily tied together to provide ongoing attractions for tourists in ways that also benefit the residents of the City. In a similar manner, new facilities could be provided for the residents’ enjoyment and funded over time by the increased revenues from tourism.

The proven interest in Civil War history in the City provides an opportunity for theatrical productions built around Mosby’s raid, the Antonia Ford story, or even a family’s letters bringing war news home from the front. Existing walking tours could take a more physical form through a connection of pedestrian plazas, more prominent (though appropriate) signage, and history-related statuary that is uniquely Fairfax. Better connections to pedestrian and bicycle trails from Old Town Fairfax and other City properties, along with the addition of nearby environmental attractions such as a City Arboretum would not only provide benefits for City residents, but would also provide additional reason for tourists to spend time in the City.

While the City has a well-established base of restaurants, the further development of ethnic restaurants in the City would promote the City’s tourism efforts. The City would also benefit from the development of restaurants and shops that would further the City’s tourism efforts. Connections between restaurants and special events should be fostered as well. For example, a number of Old Town restaurants currently offer a discount for ticket holders for the Opera Series, the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra, Virginia Opera and performances at GMU.

## The Arts as a Catalyst for Civic Involvement

The ties that bind people together into a true community are made through their interactions at all levels of life. Among the many activities that bring people together to create opportunities for this type of interaction, the enjoyment of the visual and performing arts almost always assures mutually positive experiences. Throughout history, culture and civic pride have held close ties with the involvement of the community in the visual and performing arts. The City of Fairfax is no exception to this relationship, supporting a wide variety of activities, groups and facilities oriented towards the arts. In fact, the City’s deep involvement in the arts has caused it to become recognized as a hub for the arts in Northern Virginia.

## The Arts in Community Development

The City has long recognized the value of its basic resources for the visual and performing arts and their value for promoting civic pride, action and stature. The Fairfax Art League is temporarily housed in the Old Town Village complex and hosts occasional performances in the plaza area. The location of the League offices, along with the use of the transitional retail space for exhibits and performances, has provided the arts with a strong visible presence in Old Town.

Upcoming redevelopment projects and the Fairfax Boulevard Corridor revitalization project offer more opportunities to incorporate the arts of the City into its building lobbies, streetscapes and other public and semi-public areas. Just as the City has incorporated brick sidewalks, gaslights and street trees into the fabric of Old Town Fairfax, the City would also benefit by reinforcing its tradition of involvement in the arts in the community through multiple avenues such as locating carefully chosen works of art at visual focal points throughout the City and providing more areas for outdoor performance events. An active and visible art community, given proper venues and opportunities to share their craft, can help create a vibrant and bustling downtown to entice visitors to spend more time in the City and boost the local economy. Public art also helps define the City’s character and reinforces its sense of place.



# Cultural Resources— Goal, Objective & Strategies

*Goal: Promote reasonable and appropriate integration of cultural features including the visual and performing arts into the built environment as a means of promoting tourism, civic involvement, civic pride and civic stature.*

*Objective CR-1 Develop cultural facilities that will promote tourism and enhance community interaction.*

## Strategies

**CR-1.1 Take full advantage of the opportunities to promote tourism afforded by the City's cultural assets.**

Provide physical connections among historic sites, pedestrian plazas, public art, restaurants, bed and breakfast establishments and performing arts facilities to promote the interaction available to tourists. Concentrate community appearance features in tourist areas.

**CR-1.2 Utilize the Stacy C. Sherwood Community Center and other similar facilities to support a large number and wide range of cultural activities in the City.**

The City should utilize its existing and planned facilities to accommodate a broad mixture of activities. The Stacy C. Sherwood Community Center should be available to accommodate large citywide groups and smaller groups of various sizes in a mix of activities that may change several times over the course of a day.

**CR-1.3 Enhance the quality of life for City residents while capitalizing on the commercial opportunities offered by existing and potential future cultural events.**

The City should continue to offer numerous and broad-based cultural events while increasing their contribution to economic development efforts. Additional cultural events should be chosen to address the cultural heritage of groups that represent increasing populations within the City. Encourage businesses that contribute to the success of our cultural events and to the cultural diversity of the City.

**CR-1.4 Promote the development of restaurants and shops with a regional or national market.**

The City should recognize the value of increased market size by promoting the development of restaurants and shops that relate to the tourism themes that develop with the City's tourism industry.

**CR-1.5 Foster greater awareness of GMU-related cultural and entertainment events among City residents.**

George Mason University hosts literally hundreds of cultural events in a given calendar year. Although City coordination with GMU to increase resident awareness of these events has improved in recent years, efforts should be made to further enhance the profile of GMU events among City residents. Possible approaches could include making a direct link to the GMU events calendar from the City's website calendar as well as continued inclusion in the Cityscreen-12 events listings.

*Objective CR-2 Integrate the City's visual and performing arts into its community development program.*

## Strategies

**CR-2.1 Discuss the method and opportunities which public art can be introduced into public and semi-public areas so the public can benefit from an enhanced visual environment.**

Public art, when appropriate to its environmental context, can beautify the public realm, create opportunities for community interaction, and reflect the character and traditions of the City. The City should consider formalizing a process for acquiring, receiving donations and identifying appropriate locations for installing works of art. Various City agencies, advisory boards and commissions, under the guidance of City Council, could participate in a dialogue with other interested stakeholders to discuss the role of

public art in the City and begin to identify methods by which it can continue to be incorporated into the fabric of the City. One possibility is the creation of a Public Art Committee to advise on the acquisition and installation of public art, as well as to conduct public art planning to evaluate potential locations, funding sources, and partnerships.

**CR-2.2 Assure continuing locations for local musical and dramatic productions for residents and visitors.**

The City should promote private development of facilities that accommodate musical and dramatic performances. For instance, a large indoor theater or amphitheater could accommodate large citywide groups, while smaller outdoor gathering places of various sizes could be provided in several locations in and around the City for neighborhood-level gatherings.